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From traditional grammar to functional grammar: bridging the divide

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Abstract

This paper describes our experiences using systemic functional linguistics to teach English in Australian educational settings over the last three decades. We suggest there is a continuum of approaches to describing language and highlight what we consider to be the significant affordances of a systemic functional grammar for English language teachers. With its dual emphasis on meaning and form, we argue that the model provides powerful tools for identifying curriculum priorities, for designing pedagogy and for assessing learners' accomplishments and needs. Most importantly, it offers a means of making language explicit to learners in the form of an accessible and flexible metalanguage (i.e. a language for talking about language). However, we also discuss some evolving and unresolved issues arising from our experiences in terms of curriculum, policy and professional support for teachers.

Keywords

divide, grammar, bridging, traditional, functional

Disciplines

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POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

From traditional grammar to functional grammar: bridging the divide

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This paper describes our experiences using systemic functional linguistics to teach English in Australian educational settings over the last three decades. We suggest there is a continuum of approaches to describing language and highlight what we consider to be the significant affordances of a systemic functional grammar for English language teachers. With its dual emphasis on meaning and form, we argue that the model provides powerful tools for identifying curriculum priorities, for designing pedagogy and for assessing learners' accomplishments and needs. Most importantly, it offers a means of making language explicit to learners in the form of an accessible and flexible metalanguage (i.e. a language for talking about language). However, we also discuss some evolving and unresolved issues arising from our experiences in terms of curriculum, policy and professional support for teachers.

Which grammar?

Debates around the teaching of grammar continue to erupt in the field of English language teaching. Should grammar be taught at all? While it has been argued in the past that grammar instruction is not necessary for language acquisition to take place (for example, Krashen 1982; Prabhu 1987), more recently general support has emerged for some form-focused instruction (Andrews 2007; Snyder 2008). In this paper we are not concerned with whether grammar should be taught but rather

how it should be taught. Implicitly or explicitly? Incidentally or systematically? Analytically or synthetically? Proactively or reactively? As part of teaching subject knowledge or on its own? And which model of grammar to use? In educational contexts, the debate around the choice of grammar is often framed in terms of 'traditional' vs 'functional'. We will argue here that such a framing is misleading and simplistic. We could range most descriptions of language that are typically found in English-teaching contexts along a cline between 'form' and 'function' (as in Figure 1). At the 'form' end of the continuum, we might find those traditional school grammars which focus primarily on the 'parts of speech' and syntax. At the 'function' end of the continuum, we could place the notional-functional syllabus – which, even though no longer in common use, has had a lasting impact on the field. And around the middle, we might find a number of contemporary reference grammars – including Halliday's systemic-functional grammar (SFG) – which endeavour to describe the relationship between grammatical forms and their functions.

All these language descriptions include reference to both form and function – it's a matter of orientation and emphasis. The orientation of traditional school grammar is towards the learning of structures and rules. It draws on grammatical categories such as noun, verb, pronoun, adjective, adverb, conjunction and preposition – with the occasional nod towards meaning ('a noun is a person, place or thing') and grammatical function ('the subject of the verb'). At the other extreme, the notional-functional description – though not technically a theory of grammar – emphasizes the intent of the language user: what people need to *do* with language and what *meanings* they want to express. Although its orientation is communicative, it does attempt to demonstrate how the various functions and notions can be expressed through certain grammatical forms. The notion of frequency, for example, is linked to such exponents as 'adverb', 'present (habitual) tense', or 'adverbials'.

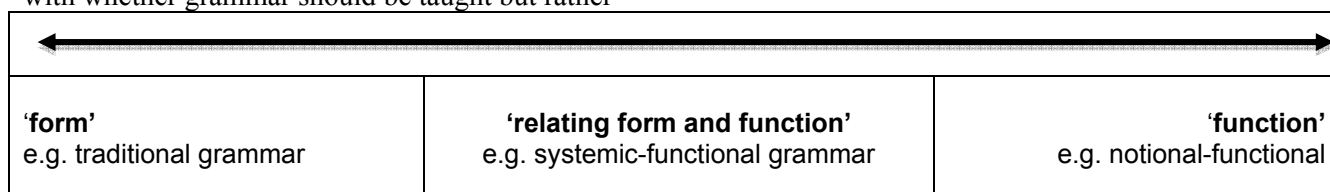


Figure 1

Towards the middle of the continuum, Halliday's systemic-functional grammar (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004) provides a bridge between 'form' and 'meaning', mapping systematically and in detail the relationship between grammatical classes and the functions they perform. While the orientation is firmly functional, the emphasis is placed equally on grammatical forms and on the meanings they make: how the grammar has evolved in particular ways to construe various kinds of meanings. At the level of form, SFG uses standard terminology to describe the grammatical classes ('preposition', 'conjunction', 'noun', 'verb' and so on). Unlike traditional grammar, however, it does not stop there – it is double-layered, constantly shunting between form and function, between grammar and semantics.

Of the other modern reference grammars around the mid-point of the continuum, some are more structurally-oriented (e.g. Huddleston and Pullum 2005) and others more functionally-oriented (e.g. Biber, Conrad and Leech 2002 and Willis 1995). They all, however, go beyond the more syntactic orientation of traditional school grammar. To deal with the problems associated with adverbs in traditional grammar, for example, most now use the term 'adverbials' in recognition of the fact that different grammatical forms (such as adverbs and prepositional phrases) can have a similar function. Similarly, certain modern grammars use terms such as *adjunct*, *subjunct*, *disjunct* and *conjunct* (e.g. Crystal 2004) or *circumstance*, *stance* and *linking* (Biber, Conrad and Leech 2002: 361) to capture differences in adverbial meaning. In relation to verbs, The Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English (Biber, Conrad and Leech 2002) discusses not only the form of the verb, but also the various kinds of meanings that verbs express: activity, communication, mental processes, causation, relations, and existence. The CoBuild Students' Grammar (Willis 1995) similarly describes verbs in terms of such functions as saying, thinking, liking and linking. At the level of the clause, some (e.g. Huddleston and Pullum 2005: 69 and 73; Biber, Conrad and Leech 2002) venture beyond the conventional grammatical functions of Subject and Object to discuss the clause as representing a situation in which various participants are involved, depending on the type of activity (e.g. the 'actor' in action clauses, the 'experiencer' in clauses about sensing; the 'causer' in clauses dealing with causation). There is also attention paid to the way in which the clause functions to package information – how the focus is changed through strategies such as pre-posing and post-posing, the use of the passive, and so on.

Furthermore, most reference grammars now include a section that goes beyond the clause to deal with issues at the level of the text, such as how certain resources function to make a text cohesive.

While these grammars include reference to functions of various kinds, the overall grammatical description is typically organized according to grammatical classes. Halliday's grammar, on the other hand, is organized around the question of how language functions to construe various kinds of meaning.

Systemic Functional Grammar

It is evident that the choice of a model of grammar is not simply a matter of 'traditional' or 'functional'. It is more a matter of what we want the model to do for us and our students. If, for example, our students need simply to learn the structure of English sentences with a focus on syntactic accuracy, drawing on familiar (though basic) terminology shared throughout the profession, then a traditional grammar will probably suffice. These days, however, there is considerable pressure on teachers of English as well as subject teachers with large numbers of EAL students in their classes to go beyond 'well-formed sentences' and to help their students operate successfully in a range of discourse contexts. This is where SFG has struck a chord among many practitioners, in that it provides a more 'comprehensive package', informing all areas of the language curriculum rather than being taught as a discrete 'topic'. In the following section, we will outline what we have found to be useful features of SFG for English teaching.

Texts in context

While most other grammars tend to restrict themselves to the level of the sentence (which is technically the domain of grammar), SFG ranges beyond the sentence to observe patterns of grammar within and across whole texts. Further, the model interprets texts in relation to their contexts of use – both the broader cultural context and the more specific situation. It seeks to describe how language choices are influenced by particular factors in the context: 'what's going on?' (the **field** or subject-matter), 'who's involved?' (the **tenor**), and 'what channel of communication?' (the **mode**). Together these form the **register**. To these, following Martin (see Christie and Martin 1997), we could add 'what's the social purpose?' (**genre**) – which describes how a text unfolds in stages depending on what the interactants want to achieve.

For example, the text presented below is an instance of an explanation genre from the Science curriculum in the early years of schooling. As part of an investigation of simple machines and after extensive exploration of the explanation genre with her teacher, the young language learner had been asked to construct a labeled and captioned diagram to accompany a talk explaining how an umbrella works. In this way, she and her classmates are being prepared for encounters with

more extended written explanations later in schooling. This text exhibits important features of these more sophisticated forms of the genre. It unfolds through a series of stages functionally identified as *the phenomenon identification* and *the explanation sequence* and includes an annotated diagram similar to those that appear in textbooks and other reference sources in the discipline of Science.

SPOKEN TEXT

Title¹

How an umbrella works

Phenomenon Identification

An umbrella is a simple machine for keeping people dry when it is raining

Explanation sequence

It has a handle to hold the umbrella up and the waterproof nylon cover helps you not get wet. And the clip holds down the umbrella safely. When you press the button, the springs shoot up. The struts spread out and open the cover.

The stop um um there (pointing)... stops the umbrella from closing when you don't want it to.

ACCOMPANYING POSTER

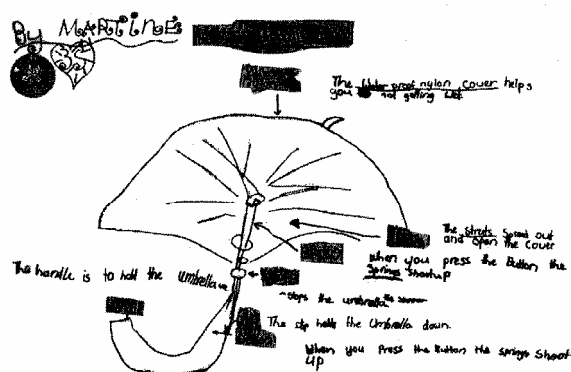


Figure 2

The register of the umbrella text may be described in the following terms:

Contextual factor	Relevant language features
Field – naming the phenomenon, its parts and the functions of these parts.	<p>The phenomenon is classified (<i>An umbrella is a simple machine</i>). Its parts are represented by noun groups such as <i>the handle</i>, <i>the waterproof nylon cover</i>, <i>the struts</i>, <i>the button</i> etc</p> <p>The functions are identified via such statements as: <i>It has a handle to hold the umbrella up and the waterproof nylon cover helps you not get wet.</i></p> <p>Causal relations are used to explain how the parts work together as a simple system; eg. <i>When you press the button, the spring shoots up.</i></p>
Tenor – young ‘expert’ to novices	<p>The speaker achieves a general ‘impersonal’ tone by making a sequence of confident statement revolving around the umbrella parts; for example, <i>The struts spread out and open the cover. And the clip holds down the umbrella safely.</i></p> <p>Where human participants are selected, they are generalized ‘you’ as in <i>The waterproof nylon cover helps you not get wet.</i></p>
Mode – oral with visual support	<p>Despite its oral mode, the text shares some features of written texts. It is monologic and has relatively few of the false starts and repetitions common to much spoken language. The labels and captions help structure the text as well as provide important support when required (<i>The stop um um there</i>).</p>

¹ These labels were not part of the learner’s original text. They have been added here to illustrate the generic stages of the text.

Thus the young learner's teacher has drawn on her knowledge of the relationship between text and context to identify and teach those aspects of genre and grammar most relevant to the topic at hand

Language as functional

The SFG model builds on the idea of language use as functional, linked to the purposes for which humans use language in the many social contexts they inhabit; for example, to explain (as we have seen above), to entertain, to instruct, to describe. The grammar is organised into three 'bundles of functions' or 'metafunctions' which relate to the major functions language plays in our lives:

- enabling us to represent our experience of the world (the 'experiential' function);
- enabling us to interact with others in the world (the 'interpersonal' function); and
- enabling us to create coherent and cohesive texts (the 'textual' function).

These metafunctions occur simultaneously in every sentence, providing different layers of meaning. They are linked to the social context through the notion of register; field is said to be realized in the experiential metafunction; tenor in the interpersonal and mode in the textual metafunction. Depending on the field being developed, we make choices from those grammatical resources that have evolved to represent experience. We might, for example, recognize how language represents the 'doings' and 'happenings' in our lives through various types of Processes² in which different kinds of Participants engage, surrounded by Circumstances relating to time, manner, cause, place, and so on. Depending on the tenor of the interaction, choices are made from those grammatical resources that have evolved to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships. These would include the grammar needed to ask questions, give commands and make statements (as above in the umbrella text); to indicate the degree to which we are committed to a proposition; to express opinions and feelings; to engage with other 'voices' and perspectives; and so on. And depending on the mode or medium being employed, choices will be made from those resources that have evolved to regulate the flow of information through a text – from the free-flowing grammar of casual, spoken language to more 'planned' spoken language such as the umbrella

text through to the compact, dense grammar of highly written texts.

As noted above, other modern grammars touch to varying degrees on similar issues of function and meaning, often influenced by Halliday and linguistics. The SFG model, however, provides a comprehensive framework within which all these features are brought together into a coherent whole. The figure below summarises the relationships between genre, register and metafunction.

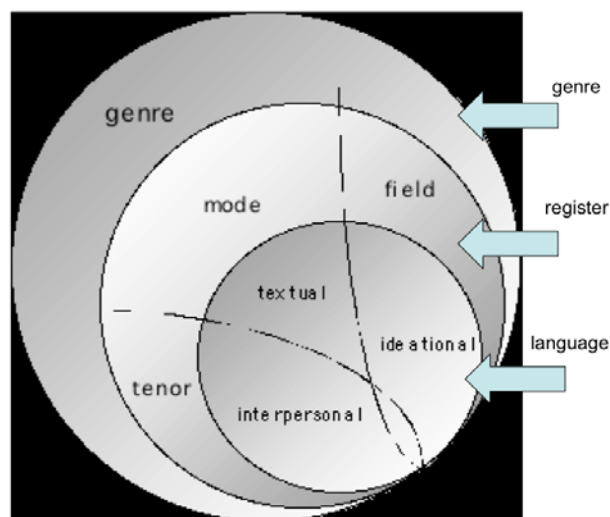


Figure 3 Genre, register and language adapted from Martin 1997: 8)

Relevance to contemporary classrooms and students' lives

For many teachers and students, a functional approach has made grammar 'come alive'. Whereas traditional approaches conceive of grammar as a set of structures which can be assessed as correct or incorrect, Halliday sees language as a resource, a meaning-making system through which we interactively shape and interpret our world and ourselves.

Because it is multidimensional, there are several 'entry points':

- Coming in at the level of the cultural context, students can see how language varies across the different discourse communities in which they participate. They can observe the ways in which different cultures use language to represent experience and to interact with others. They can critically analyse how values and beliefs influence language choices.
- Coming in through genre, students can understand how texts are organized according to the social purpose/s they are

² Capital letters are typically used to denote functional terms.

trying to achieve and how grammatical patterns contribute to the meaning of the text.

- Coming in through register, students can see the relationship between various factors in the context and how these impact on the choices we make from the language system. For example, students may investigate the differences between texts representing the same topic but written for different audiences; in other words, the texts in which the field and mode are constant but tenor varies.
- Coming in through the metafunctions, students can learn how language is used to construct the meanings of the various curriculum areas – the worlds of literature, science, mathematics, geography, and so on; how language shapes identities and relationships; and how spoken texts differ from written texts – and from multimodal texts.
- Coming in through notions of mode, SFG can be usefully applied to working with students to construct and interpret spoken, visual and digital texts by asking questions of purpose, audience, genre and register.
- Coming in through the grammar, students can see how clauses and sentences are structured in various ways – ultimately relating these grammatical items back to the meanings being made.

From traditional to functional grammar

Although functional grammar might appear to offer students valuable tools to support language development in the contemporary classroom, there is still resistance to its adoption, with teachers, textbook publishers, and policy-makers tending to remain with traditional grammar. To a certain extent, this is understandable. Traditional grammar has endured over the centuries and it provides a shared point of reference in the profession. SFG, on the other hand, is a relative newcomer, with a history of only some forty years. While traditional grammar is familiar, SFG requires a different way of thinking about language.

It is not a matter, however, of abandoning traditional grammar but of building on it. Functional grammar, for example, employs standard terms such as article, adjective, noun, and prepositional phrase to refer to grammatical

classes. Like most other modern grammars, however, it would combine these into a noun group (or phrase):

<i>the</i>	<i>black</i>	<i>umbrella</i>	<i>with the tortoiseshell handle</i>
article	adjective	noun	prepositional phrase
noun group			

This in itself is a significant move in teaching and learning, allowing students to think in terms of ‘meaningful chunks’. Most grammars would take a further step, beyond simply naming these categories, and would consider the **function** of the grammatical class. Traditional grammar conceives of function in such terms as the ‘subject’ of the verb. Functional grammar also uses such terms, but goes further – pointing out that the category of ‘noun group’, for example, can have a number of different functions. It can have an experiential function, representing the participants in events and happenings (the people, places and things of our experience). It can have an interpersonal function, where it can participate in creating patterns of interaction. And it can have a textual function, where it might signal how a topic is being developed or how a text is organized. It is such functions that make SFG appealing to teachers and students, as they can see a more immediate relevance to their everyday lives: how they use language to talk about what’s going on; how they use language to interact with others; and how they shape the organization of texts.

If there is to be a move building on traditional grammar but with a more functional orientation, there are a number of issues to be addressed. The following section looks at the implications of such a move for curriculum development, teachers, learners and policy-makers.

Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment

In the Australian context, SFG has informed the teaching of students from linguistically diverse backgrounds in schools and adult settings for a number of years (for examples see Martin 1999; Rose, Luis-Chivizhe, McKnight and Smith 2003). The approach has been adopted for the new national English curriculum for students in years 1 to 10 (ACARA 2010). There are several important reasons for this uptake; reasons related to the points we have already made but which have

particular implications for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Firstly, the model enables teachers to integrate language and content in their planning because functional grammar (as we have seen above) provides a basis for predicting which linguistic features are likely to arise within a particular context. In this way, teachers are able to be proactive rather than reactive in their language teaching. They can identify the purposes and functions for which students must use language and then map these onto specific genre/s, text patterns and register variables. They are also better placed to identify the demands of learning tasks.

In the example above, the teacher drew on her knowledge of genre, register and grammar to plan a literacy program embedded in the curriculum content. Recognising that the Science curriculum is host to explanation genres which range from simple to complex she was able to ‘backward map’ to a text form which was within the grasp of her class of eight year-olds yet would prepare them for more challenging texts they would encounter later in schooling. The Simple Machines field enabled students to closely observe and manipulate familiar everyday items such as umbrellas, eggbeaters, staplers and hand drills so that they could readily become ‘experts’ in how they worked. Focusing on spoken text enabled the learners to encounter the structure of the genre and other aspects of the text without the additional burden of producing them in written form at this early stage of development. The teacher introduced the learners to the multimodal conventions of the discipline; teaching them how to read and construct diagrams as well as about their complementary role with verbal text. The

poster also served to support their spoken explanations. Her grammar teaching for this teaching episode revolved around assisting students to build factual description via the noun group (*the waterproof nylon cover*) and to express causal relations (*When you press the button, the springs shoot up.*) Awareness of these language features will assist the students to come to terms with more extended written texts that describe and explain a range of phenomena.

Of course, as English language learners enter different points of the educational system, they encounter a greater variety of texts in which more genres and registers are at play. For example, the writing of an essay in the field of commerce by an undergraduate or senior secondary school student on the effects of the global economy on developing countries requires a more complex explanation than that evident in the umbrella text. While the genre remains constant, the register is significantly different and hence a good many more linguistic features are at risk. The field is more specialized and abstract rather than commonsense and observable; multiple causal relationships (rather than the simple linear sequence of the umbrella mechanism) must be managed. In terms of tenor, the undergraduate student must position herself or himself in the field as a scholar-in-training; achieving the right balance of assuredness, ‘objectivity’, and knowledge. The shift in mode from spoken to written language will require control of the organizational features of English. This instance of the genre is a highly symbolic artefact that must mean ‘on its own’. The following table presents a range of grammatical features at stake in learning to control such a text. Awareness of these will greatly assist teachers’ planning

Contextual factor	Potential language focus
Purpose Expository genre: causal explanation of a phenomenon	The distinctive functional stages that such a text needs to develop in order to achieve its rhetorical purpose.
Field The academic discipline of commerce (including cause and effect implication sequences)	eg lexicogrammatical resources for building field-specific technicality, the nominalization of experience, the expression of causal relationships
Tenor The construal of self as knowledgeable, critical apprentice interacting with ‘the academy’ (mediated by the lecturer as assessor)	eg the indirect expression of probability; the degree of commitment to a proposition; resources for critical evaluation; citing practices; the choice of speech role pronouns
Mode Written product (through a process of reading, discussion and drafting) perhaps with accompanying diagram/visuals	eg cohesive devices; resources for manipulating the flow of information (eg foregrounding and backgrounding; signalling the development of the argument)

One issue for SFG is its applicability to multisemiotic texts (i.e. texts drawing on semiotic resources beyond language such as image or sound). We acknowledge that there is much work to be done in this respect. However, because of the emphasis on meaning, SFG is applicable to forms of semiosis outside of language. In terms of visual texts, Callow (2003) works with teachers and students by posing questions based around the metafunctions such as:

- What actions, objects and settings are evident? (Experiential)
- How are aspects such as colour, angle, shot distance, and the media employed used to construct an interpersonal relationship between the viewer and the 'viewed'? (Interpersonal)
- What layout choices are made and what is the effect of those choices? (Textual)

Of course, a visual grammar alone won't be sufficient for all the possibilities and challenges offered by digital technology but the success of the above suggests that SFG has much to offer teachers for classroom use (for example, see Unsworth 2001). Constructs of genre and register may also be applied to the construction of new text forms and indeed offer a way into comprehending these through such investigations as 'What is the purpose of the text?' and 'Who is the intended reader?' While notions of purpose and audience have been inherent in English curricula for many years, SFG provides explicit and specific tools for 'pinning down' what these look like in language and in other semiotic systems.

Importantly for English language learners, SFG assists teachers in supporting learners' development of academic language. Traditionally grammars have been based on written language but because of its emphasis on language in use SFG is equally applicable to spoken language. The differences between the two are accounted for by means of the mode continuum which conceptualizes language as points along a continuum from that spoken in a face-to-face encounter such as an experiment in a science laboratory to that produced as highly abstract written form such as a scientific report for a prestigious academic journal (Figure 4). In this way the distinction between the context bound, dynamic, oral texts produced at one end of the continuum can be contrasted to those decontextualised, dense, written academic texts at the other. It is the latter that English language students must learn in order to be successful in educational settings. However success in doing so

is reliant on the use of spoken language in a range of situations resonating with different points along the mode continuum. Positing the relationship between spoken and written language in this way provides teachers with another tool for designed pedagogy. Gibbons (2009) demonstrates the importance of the mode continuum in planning classroom environments which assist English language learners develop facility with abstract texts and meanings. In addition, knowledge of the mode continuum assists teachers make judgements about learners' use of spoken language on the basis of appropriacy or effectiveness in a given situation rather than on the basis of rules of 'correctness'.

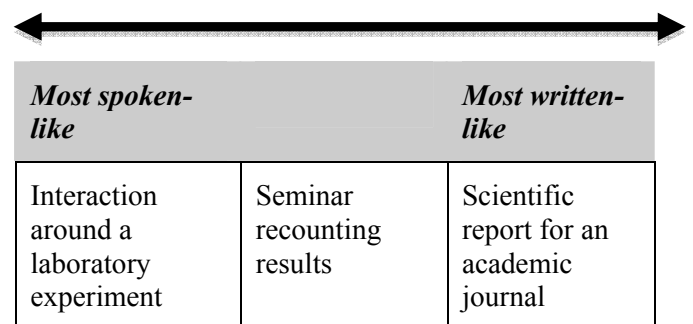


Figure 4

As well as informing curriculum content (the 'what' to teach), the SFG model has also informed pedagogic design (the 'how'). The close relationship between learning and language development is a key tenet of the model, bringing together Vygotskian traditions of learning through interaction and studies of language development. The approach is widely used to design literacy pedagogy in schools, community colleges and universities across Australia and elsewhere. The central notion of 'guidance through interaction in the context of shared experience' (Martin 1999: 126) is captured in a curriculum cycle that uses genre and the curriculum context as starting points for content-based language teaching. Teachers introduce the focus genre and explicitly teach students about its social context, its typical structure and salient aspects of the grammar. Drawing on that shared metalanguage, teacher and students are then able to jointly construct an instance of the genre. In this way students are supported toward independent success. While the model is applied flexibly and recursively – rather than in a lock-step fashion – it is commonly represented in the following diagram.

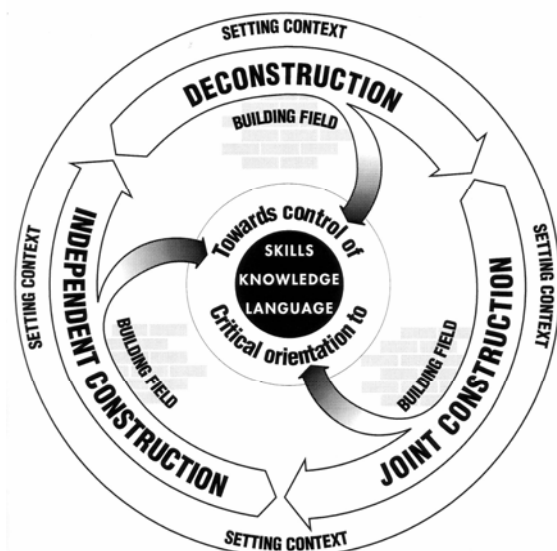


Figure 5: The curriculum cycle (Rothery and Stenglin 1995)

SFG provides a useful tool kit for assessing students' texts in all teaching contexts. It helps make what is valued visible to teachers and students alike and enables discussion to move beyond the surface features of spelling and punctuation and beyond sentence level syntax. Because teachers make aspects of the text explicit to students, the criteria for success can be shared. This shared understanding involves knowledge about genre (including its staging) and register. In the adult TESOL context, SFG has provided the basis for a discourse-orientated approach to assessment (see Feez 1998). For schools-based literacy programs, SFG has proved particularly useful in the National Assessment and Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). This national assessment incorporates a writing task undertaken by all students in years 3 (approx 8 years of age), 5, 7 and 9 (approx 15 years of age). Schools have recently been advised that students will be asked to compose an argument text that will be assessed according to such criteria as audience, text structure, ideas, persuasive devices, vocabulary, cohesion, paragraphing, and sentence structure – features informed by a functional view of language. Similarly although more focused on assessment for teacher professional learning, Rose (2010) uses SFG informed assessment criteria to assist teachers develop literacy programs in response to students' needs. These include context (e.g. purpose, staging, register), discourse and grammar (e.g. phases³, vocabulary, conjunction, reference) and graphic features (paragraphing, spelling, punctuation).

³ Phases are steps a text goes through within the generic stages. Phases can be a paragraph or a few sentences long. For a fuller discussion see Martin and Rose 2008.

One important issue arising from all of this curriculum activity is that of the need for quality materials for use in classrooms and in teacher education settings. To date teachers have tended to make their own or adapt existing resources. With the exception of initiatives by specific sectors within Australia and elsewhere (such as the Adult Migrant Educational Program (NSW)) and discrete projects undertaken by education departments, there are few commercial products widely available. Many resources for teaching grammar tend to favour traditional approaches and are EFL-orientated – and hence not appropriate for students who must acquire subject-specific, curriculum-responsive English. The picture is a little brighter with respect to teacher education materials. There are several widely used resources namely text books (Coffin, Donohue and North 2009; Butt et al. 2000; Feez 1998; Droga and Humphrey 2002 and 2003; Derewianka 1990 and 1998; Gibbons 2009) and DVDs (Love et al. 2003 and 2008). However, given a changing curriculum and policy context and the evolution of theory and teachers' knowledge about language, there is an urgent need for more materials for use in a range of settings and with newer communications technologies such as interactive whiteboards.

Stakeholders

Teachers

Few would disagree that SFG is a challenging theory to come to grips with. As with most other reference grammars, the model is relatively complex. However it is not presented for classroom use in its full complexity. Over the years it has been interpreted in ways that make it more accessible for teachers and students. Our experience with teachers has been that, after an initial period of feeling somewhat overwhelmed, they start to see how the model works and its potential applications. Rather than trying to take on everything at once, they experiment with one area that they find manageable and useful. For those who are familiar with traditional grammar, functional grammar takes them beyond the study of structure to real-world applications in supporting students' language and literacy development; for those who are not familiar with traditional grammar, SFG provides a more relevant 'way in' through genre and function, eventually making contact with the traditional grammatical categories that realize those functions.

Professional development programs need to be substantial and ongoing and need to address pedagogy as well as knowledge. Teachers can't always appreciate the potential of functional

grammar until they have come to terms with key principles; this is difficult to achieve in short seminars. A number of successful programs for school-based teachers have evolved to meet this need, some of which have been delivered in the UK and elsewhere as well as Australia; for example, ESL in the Mainstream and Language and Literacy (both referred to in an article by Dare in this volume), Reading to Learn⁴, and Accelerated Literacy. The implementation aspect of any professional learning program is also critical; if teachers do not understand the orientation of the model toward whole texts in their contexts of use then the pedagogy is at risk of becoming restricted to teaching normative structures and grammatical labels in isolation from meaning. In this respect, vignettes of exemplary classroom practice are important resources for teacher educators and particularly so for pre-service teacher preparation programs where students have fewer resources and experiences upon which to draw (see Harper and Rennie 2009 for discussion of pre-service teachers' preparedness to teach grammar).

English language teachers have played an important role in developing applications of SFG for classroom use. The beginnings of the approach were in multilingual, disadvantaged schools; now SFG is a major component of most TESOL postgraduate programs in Australia. TESOL graduates are key resource figures in schools yet most English language learners find themselves in mainstream classrooms with teachers whose initial preparation often focuses on broader issues of literacy rather than educational linguistics. As a result of the curriculum and assessment changes described above, most mainstream teachers – particularly in the primary school – are comfortable with the notion of genre (or 'text type') and familiar with the pedagogic approach. They are considerably less confident about relations between text and context and grammar (Hammond and Macken-Horarik 2001). Our current research confirms these findings and suggests that many subject teachers (particularly in secondary school settings) have no formal study of language and draw upon partially remembered folklore about language and grammar (Jones, Chen, Lewis and Derewianka 2010). Our current research project, like those listed above, involves working with mainstream teachers to develop more comprehensive understandings of the grammar and to assist in designing pedagogic responses to curriculum imperatives and learners' needs.

Learners

While teachers might baulk initially at some of the unfamiliar terminology and concepts, students tend to take them in their stride and use them productively. There are a number of case studies of student development and use of a functional metalanguage documented in the research (see for example, Martin 1999; Williams 2005; Jones 2005) and in professional learning materials (for example, Love et al. 2006 and 2008). Williams' work suggests that functional terms, because they coincide with the learners' experiences in the world, are the best point of departure for young language learners. However, more case studies of teachers and learners at work with the grammar are needed. Curriculum and assessment rubrics tend to map what are understood to be the contextual demands at particular points in an individual's experience; we have yet to fully capture a picture of what development in understanding looks like over time. What is urgently needed are accounts of development in metalinguistic awareness; in other words how cumulative knowledge about language is built over time. Of course, this relies on the systematic teaching of the grammar – a difficult achievement when teacher expertise is unevenly distributed. For bilingual and EAL learners such a project has special significance; many enter English speaking contexts at different points and with different linguistic resources.

Policy-makers

Though teachers and students are enjoying the benefits of SFG, policy makers, the media and textbook writers are harder to persuade. Policy makers are wary because of its perceived 'newness' and complexity, requiring evidence to demonstrate that an SFG-informed approach makes a difference, that teachers find it useful, that students are benefitting and that there is sufficient payoff for the expense of upskilling teachers. It has taken decades for SFG to be accepted in Australia; change has been incremental, brought about by strategic and persistent work with teachers and students, colleagues in professional associations, employers and individuals within systems. The uptake has been faster in adult settings – perhaps because of the less hierarchical nature of these organizations; perhaps because a critical mass of teacher-experts emerged earlier than in school settings. Nevertheless, the fruition of the efforts in school settings is the current widespread support for a national English curriculum underpinned by functional grammar. The draft curriculum notes:

Grammar refers both to the language we use and the description of language as a

⁴ Reading to Learn also prepares teachers for working with the model in adult learning settings.

system. In describing language attention is paid to both the structure (syntax) and meaning (semantics) at the level of the word, the sentence and the text. The English curriculum uses standard grammatical terminology within a contextual framework; that is, how language functions to enable us to interact with others, to express and develop ideas, and to create and comprehend texts

(ACARA 2010: 5)

The metafunctional orientation is obvious; what may be less obvious is how the relation between traditional and functional terminology is to be managed. For example, in year 2 (approx age 7) it is anticipated that students will develop understandings about the functions of constituents in sentence level grammar by learning that ‘Language can be used to represent ‘What’s happening?’ (action verbs), ‘who or what is doing or receiving the action?’ (nouns/noun phrases); ‘details about the situation?’ (adverbials)’.

(ACARA 2010: 21)

In this way function and class are firmly linked. Some dilution is necessary as SFG still requires shaping for pedagogic applications. Nevertheless, there are some concepts which other grammars simply do not provide. These include thematic organization of text and grammatical metaphor. With respect to the latter, in the draft English curriculum year 9 students (approx age 15) learn that ‘information can be condensed by collapsing a clause into a noun group and that this is termed ‘nominalisation’. (ACARA 2010: 73) Further explanation is provided for teachers as:

- Knowing that nominalisation is a key resource in the development of mature written texts.
- Knowing how more everyday, oral ways of expressing ideas (e.g. ‘We produced the play in the open air’) can be expressed using a nominalised form (e.g. ‘The open-air production of the play ...’).

This is one area of the grammar in which the pay-off for EAL students is substantial because coming to grips with nominalisation is essential for gaining control over the decontextualised language associated with texts from the most-written-like end of the mode continuum – and hence academic literacy (see Dare article p18 this volume for further explanation).

In conclusion

As knowledge and experience evolve, we are mindful of how much teachers will be able to take on board and how media and public commentators will respond. The Australian media tends to see traditional grammar as a hallmark of civilization and any change as controversial. It wades in regularly to lament the passing of traditional grammar from contemporary English teaching. It applauded the new curriculum as ‘back to basics’, linking grammar with spelling, punctuation and accuracy rather than with a means for supporting students’ literacy learning (Aly 2010). There remains no shortage of textbooks which address these ‘basics’. Although publishers have gradually taken on genre or text types and aspects of SFG such as cohesion, they have not seen SFG as a profitable commercial enterprise. However, we are hopeful that this too will change as the critical mass of people with expertise in the area here continues to expand and we watch the work of colleagues around the world (see for example Schleppegrell p26 also this volume).

In summary, we have endeavoured to show how systemic functional grammar can offer much to English language teachers. The account of English discourse and grammar offered by Halliday has provided us – and our students in turn – with a rich resource for explicit work with language in classrooms in many settings. With respect to the vexed question of which grammar to teach, we suggest that it is not a simple either/or answer. Rather we have attempted to show how aspects of traditional grammar remain relevant but that SFG offers much more to teachers and students in terms of understanding what and how meanings are made in the range of contexts in which students need to use English. In describing the benefits in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; we have shown how educational applications of SFG have travelled far from their genesis in Halliday’s early work teaching Chinese to native English speakers (Webster 2005). However, we have also acknowledged that there are important unresolved issues in the evolution of SFG in the Australian contexts – some of these will be shared with teachers and teacher educators in the UK and elsewhere. We anticipate these will form part of the ongoing dialogue among linguists and teachers as the theory and its applications continue to expand.

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